

# The Message of Jesus to the Church of Smyrna Revelation 2:8-11

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## Background

Crossing hermeneutical bridges

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The great rival city to Ephesus

Considered the loveliest city of the Province of Asia

The ornament of Asia, the crown of Asia, the flower of Asia

Noted for its municipal rivalry and local pride

### Reputation

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The West wind, the gentle zephyr blew through its streets and "makes it as fresh as a grove of trees." – Aristides.

Smyrna means "myrrh" – Matt 2:11; Mk 15:23; Jn 19:39

Birthplace of Homer

### Reputation

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### Geography

- 35 miles north of Ephesus
- On the trade route of the rich Hermus Valley
- On the end of a long arm of the Aegean Sea
- Land locked harbor in the center of the city

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### Geography

- At the end of the road from the Far East through Phrygia and the city of Lydia
- It was a planned city – burned down in 600 B.C. and rebuilt 290 B.C. by Alexander the Great.
- This made it a model city with straight, broad streets laid out in rectangles which were all paved.

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## Geography

- The most famous of streets was the Street of Gold.
- Began at the harbor and ended at the temple of Zeus

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## Economics

- A great trade city linking the Far East with the Mediterranean
- One of the greatest and safest harbors of Asia
- During times of war the harbor could be chained off at its mouth.

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## Economics

- The harbor was in the center of the city
- Coins of Smyrna held an inscription of a merchant ship ready for sea
- Boasted the largest theatre in Asia

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## Economics

- Hosted sporting games rivalling Ephesus
- Had a vast library
- 200,000 people living in Smyrna

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## Politics

- A Free City – self governed, no Roman soldiers
- An Assize City – Roman court cases heard there
- First city to erect a temple to the goddess Roma in 195 B.C.

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## Politics

- A.D. 26 – cities were competing to erect a temple to the Emperor Tiberius, Smyrna was chosen, even above Ephesus.
- It was the seat of Emperor worship – Caesar cult

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## Religion

- Temples in Smyrna were abundant
- To the Cybele, Apollo, Nemeseis, Aphrodite, Asclepius, Roma, Emperors, and Zeus
- A large number of influential Jews living in Smyrna who contributed their wealth to the beautification of the city

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## Religion

- Smyrna hosted a display of paganism rivalled only by Ephesus.

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## Christianity

- Likely began with Paul's teaching to the Ephesians and followed up by John
- Christians were very poor in Smyrna
- Christians were subject to mob violence

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## Christianity

- The church was highly persecuted in Smyrna
  - The Jewish community stirred up trouble for the Christians and singled them out
  - Economic and social life was centered around the cults
  - Cesar/Rome worship made it nearly impossible to live out a Christian life

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## Christianity

- Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna was the most famous of all martyrs in Smyrna
  - Was a disciple of John and the last of the disciples trained by the original disciples of Jesus
  - He was taken to be burned alive during the times of the public games
  - “Eighty and six years have I served Him and He never did me harm. How then can I blaspheme my king and my savior?”

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## Present Day

- Modern day Izmir – Turkish for Smyrna
- The largest metropolis in Asia minor today
- The harbor is still in operation

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## Message to Smyrna

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Description of Jesus

- The first and the last, who died and came to life again.
- Question: Why use this description of Jesus to this church?

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Description of Jesus

- Answer:
  - Smyrna died and came to life again.
  - Encouragement that Jesus would be with them all the way through poverty and death and that they too would come to life again.

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## Encouragement From Jesus

- “I know” – Jesus has an intimate and all encompassing knowledge of persecution and affliction from personal experience!
- I know your:
  - Affliction
  - Poverty
  - Slander

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## NOTE!

- Synagogue of satan
- Refers to the Jewish people who are acting out satan’s desires in persecuting the Christians.
- See also Rom 2:28-29; Jn 8:31-47

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## More Encouragement

- You are rich
- Question: How can they be called rich when they live in such poverty?

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## More Encouragement

- Do not be afraid of suffering
- Clearly suffering is coming, it will happen
  - Prison
  - Persecution
  - Point of death

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## More Encouragement

- Be faithful/loyal – people of Smyrna knew about loyalty.
- Question: 10 days – What is that?  
Answer: 10 is an intensive number to indicate that a certain number of days is set which will be an intense time, in this case, of persecution.

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## Reward

- Crown of life – the laurel wreath which was used in the games which is connected with victory and joy
- Not hurt at all by the second death – see Rev 20:6,14; 21:8

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## NOTE!

- Jesus has nothing negative to say about this church! It is all encouragement!
- Only 2 churches in the 7 that Jesus does not say anything negative about

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## Conclusion

- Those who are faithful and loyal to follow Jesus through suffering, even intense suffering, will only suffer one death; they will not suffer the second death of eternal separation from God.
- Jesus is always with us, knows suffering through experience and even suffered death; now He lives and so too will the faithful who follow Him

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